

House Committee on International Relations:
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
And
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International
Operations

Statement of Sakie Yokota
Mother of Megumi Yokota, Japanese abductee
Representing the
Organization of Families of Japanese Victims Kidnapped by North Korea

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Chairman Leach, Chairman Smith, honorable Members of the Committees, I would like to thank you for providing me this valuable opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Sakie Yokota, mother of Megumi Yokota who was 13 years old when she was abducted to North Korea in November 1977, 29 long years ago. For 20 agonizing years after Megumi disappeared while on her way home from junior high school, we did not know what had happened to her. It was 20 years later, in 1997, when we learned she had been kidnapped by North Korean agents and turned into a teacher for the “Japanization” of North Korean agents at the intelligence training school of the Kim Jong-il Political Military University on the outskirts of Pyongyang, North Korea.

Naturally, we were immediately overjoyed with the thought that Megumi is alive and hope of being able to see her right away. At the same time, we were also plagued by doubts about why an incident of this proportion had not been known to us for so long. Since then, nine more years have passed and we are still unable to reach our daughter. It saddens me profoundly and I feel so humiliated whenever I think about why we cannot rescue her.

Kim Jong-il continually denied the abduction of Japanese until he suddenly reversed himself at the Japanese-North Korean summit meeting held in September 2002. At that time he acknowledged the abduction of just 13 Japanese. However, the number of Japanese citizens that North Korea has abducted goes way beyond 13. In the case of most victims, North Korea to this day refuses to acknowledge their kidnapping. We have listed the cases for more than 450 people whose family members or others requested to have investigated as suspected cases of abduction. Out of those, the Japanese government has confronted North Korea with the cases of more than 30 missing Japanese in diplomatic negotiations.

Of the 13 Japanese it has admitted kidnapping, North Korea claims 8 victims are dead, including my daughter Megumi, Ms Yaeko Taguchi, Ms Rumiko

Masumoto, and Mr. Shu-Ichi Ichikawa, all four of whose family members are here today with me. To support its contention of their death, North Korea presented only paper, including eight death certificates with a medical doctor's signature, one book of dead patients from a hospital, and two traffic accident reports allegedly documented by the police. All of these were thoroughly examined by the Japanese government and all were judged to be worthless and unreliable.

In November 2004, North Korea gave to the Japanese government some ashes it claimed were my daughter Megumi's remains, but when advanced DNA testing was done in Japan, it was proven that these ashes were instead from 2 entirely different people whose ages were far apart from Megumi's. Other DNA tests also revealed that ashes claimed to be the remains of another abductee, Mr. Kaoru Masuki, likewise were those of entirely different persons.

Please let me show you a picture of my daughter Megumi taken in North Korea soon after her kidnapping. This was given to the Japanese government along with the false ashes in November, 2004. She looks so lonesome in this photograph that when I saw it I couldn't resist caressing her picture and saying, "Oh, Megumi, you were here, in this kind of place; how frightened you must have been. Please forgive me for not rescuing you yet." Megumi's younger brother Takuya, who is here with me today, and another brother, also stared at this photo and they wept.

In September, 2002, after the Japanese North Korean summit meeting, we learned of the existence of Kim Hae-kyung, Megumi's daughter and our granddaughter. Then, on the 11th of April this year, another DNA test revealed that Megumi's husband, the father of our granddaughter, is actually Kim Young-nam, a South Korean abduction victim. Mr. Kim Young-nam was kidnapped in 1978 when he was a 16 year old high school student. It was one year after my daughter Megumi's abduction. So far it has been established that as many as 5 South Korean high school students, including Yong Nam, were abducted around that time. The North Korean authorities, however, have not

acknowledged kidnapping any of these South Korean nationals, including Kim Young-nam.

I feel a deep burning anger toward the North Korean regime. It has invented countless lies and deceptions while defiantly mocking us with its claim of innocence. We need to rescue the numerous abductees from as many as 12 different countries around the world who were innocent of any wrong-doing when they became victims of the outrageous state terrorism perpetrated by North Korea. They have been seeking our help from their confinement in that closed country for too many years now. We must also not forget the North Korean people who suffer from atrocious human rights abuses of their government.

In the case of my daughter Megumi, we learned about her abduction from a North Korean agent who later took asylum. He testified that when Megumi was kidnapped, “she was held in a small dark chamber in the bottom of a special intelligence ship where she scraped the walls with her fingers while crying out desperately, ‘Mother, help me!’, and that is how she was carried across the dark sea.”

A quarter of a century has elapsed since then. We as well as the parents of other abductees are running out of time because of our advancing age. My daughter Megumi and other abductees must be alive somewhere in North Korea. And the whole world knows by now the savagery of that country and how lightly it makes of human lives. The description by your President George W. Bush, calling it the “axis of evil”, is exactly right.

Numerous youngsters of Japan, South Korea and many other countries have been detained for several decades. They know they would be sent to a concentration camp or be executed if they don’t behave as ordered. They are waiting for our help, even now. It is as if they are being drowned. If we see someone being drowned it is the nature of our humanity that we would immediately jump into the water extending our hand to help, putting aside

everything else.

We the families are fatigued, both physically and mentally, yet we cannot stop as long as our own children are seeking our help. I pray that the people of Japan and America, and all freedom-loving people of the world, in unison, will clearly demonstrate to North Korea that we are really “angry.” I plead for all countries to join us in saying that “we will not forgive the abductions, all the victims must be returned immediately or we will initiate economic sanctions.”

Last month in Japan, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Schieffer kindly inspected the site in Niigata Prefecture where Megumi was abducted. He himself obviously felt the cruelty of the kidnapping and remarked that “this is one of the saddest stories, if not the saddest, I have ever heard”. We cannot recover the lost years for our children, but we can rescue the victims that were abducted from many countries of the world and allow them to spend the rest of their life in the lands of freedom. This is a sincere wish from the bottom of our hearts for all of the family members.

Members of Congress, members of the Administration and people of America, please render us your help.

Thank you very much.